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Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations

Contribution made by the Department of Management to the improvement of management practices, and time-bound plan for the reduction of duplication, complexity and bureaucracy in the United Nations administrative processes and procedures**

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared in compliance with General Assembly resolution 59/275 of 23 December 2004, in which the Assembly endorsed the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-fourth session (A/59/16).

The report deals with the recommendations requesting the Secretary-General to report on the contribution made by the Department of Management to the improvement of management practices, including measures to increase efficiency and productivity in the Secretariat. It focuses on improvements implemented by the Department during the period from January 2003 through June 2005.

The report also addresses the recommendations requesting the Secretary-General to develop a time-bound plan for the reduction of duplication, complexity and bureaucracy in United Nations administrative processes and procedures, including the adoption of a Secretariat-wide approach to streamline and automate them.

* A/60/150.

** The decision of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Management to combine the responses to the two related but distinct reporting requests contained in resolution 59/275 required additional revisions and delayed the submission of the present report.

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I. Introduction

1. Although numerous improvements in management practices have been fostered by the series of reform agendas promulgated within the Secretariat since 1997, the present report focuses on the contribution of the Department of Management to improved management practices that have been implemented and have produced results during the period from January 2003 to June 2005. The report highlights a selected group of measures that, separately or in concert, have effected a more efficient and/or productive approach to financial and administrative processes. The latter portion of the report addresses specific recommendations on administrative tasks, procedures and policies with a view to eliminating duplication and unnecessary and complex bureaucratic procedures and practices within all Departments and entities of the Secretariat. It also provides a review and update of the implementation status of the recommendations as of August 2005 and offers projected time frames for the final implementation of the measures.

2. It is hoped that the present report, considered together with reporting on accountability (A/60/312), and on the progress and impact of management improvement measures (A/60/70) will provide an overall view of the current effort to achieve a high standard of management performance in the Secretariat.

II. Contribution made by the Department of Management to the improvement of management practices

3. Measures that have changed the way the Secretariat does its business, day to day, so that staff members engaged in various processes are more productive or efficient in accomplishing their work, are presented below. Clients served by staff employing these measures are the beneficiaries of quicker, more reliable services, and they, in turn, become more efficient in carrying out their core tasks. In other words, many of the improvements reported below have generated productivity gains on both sides of the service encounter.

4. Information on improvements in management practices within the Department of Management are presented below. Offices away from headquarters have also significantly improved operations and services in recent years. A number of such measures, in various stages of implementation during 2004, are identified and discussed in the report entitled "Progress and impact assessment of management improvement measures" (A/60/70) also submitted under item 123 of the provisional agenda "Review of efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations".

5. The report focuses on concrete measures with a direct impact on productivity and efficiency. The measures are explained in functional terms so that their merits can be well understood. This approach has been taken because in recent intergovernmental debates the General Assembly has called for more complete detail in justifying the merits of various improvements and the Department concurs that its Secretariat-level reporting on improvement measures would benefit from fuller explanation. The report attempts to respond to questions such as "Why does this measure merit mention? How does it work in practice? What procedures did this measure replace? How is it an improvement — what is the evidence?".

6. The report does not cover upgrades in technological infrastructure of the Organization that are devoted to closing the gap with evolving technical standards or measures that principally support business continuity in the event of a catastrophe (such measures would prevent the collapse of mission-critical functions and mitigate the loss of productivity; however, their activation would be incident-triggered and they are not applicable to normal resources management). The report also excludes policy initiatives. While the Department of Management provides leadership and sets policy within the domains of financial and administrative management and, in that role, often creates the conditions for productivity gains, those gains can only be claimed by inference. For example, it has been the responsibility of the Department to provide practical guidance on delegation of authority. A working group directed by the Department examined the implications of the new policy, prescribed certain procedures and defined certain considerations that would aid in the implementation of the policy. This work is captured in a guidebook on the delegation of authority, issued in the third quarter of 2005. There are other areas of policymaking that, as they work their way into operations, can reasonably be inferred to produce productivity gains on an indirect basis. These areas are not addressed here.

7. The report also presents a series of profiles of the improved management practices, organized according to their functional areas: centralized support services; human resources management; and financial and budgetary management. Each profile describes the improvement and its implementation status, providing supporting facts or arguments to show that the improvement is in fact more productive or efficient and giving some indication as to how the measure fits into the overall strategy of improved practice.

8. In centralized support services, opportunities for process redesign can be vigorously pursued. Given the generic nature of some of the services, the practice of benchmarking against private sector practices has been beneficial. As shown in this report, services and processes in all functional areas can indeed be improved.

A. Improved management practices in centralized support services

1. Automated space management system

9. The automated space management system provides automated updating of office space floor plans, reconciling space entitlements with staff grade by means of real-time connectivity. The improved system manages and monitors space allocation more efficiently, as floor plans and occupancy data are now accessible to managers through the Intranet.

10. The system provides the layout of office space and other data related to the overall office environment. Any office can be viewed and a new location reviewed using the system. Square footage, population and support rooms are all elements of the data used by the system to program new space proposals. Recommendations are also modelled and evaluated through the system to provide advice on best value and use of space. These features have been and are currently being used successfully for major projects such as the projects concerning the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (in which 140 staff members were relocated to 1 Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza), Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in which office space was reconsolidated for 740 staff members, and the Department of Safety and Security, in

which office space was expanded and reconsolidated for 360 security officers and 100 office staff.

11. The system has been fully implemented. As a result, moving services can be organized more expeditiously and projects depending on flexibly available office space can be implemented in shorter time periods. The initiative is in line with the report of the Secretary-General on the information and communications technology strategy (A/57/620), particularly in the focus area of e-management, as it has enabled decision-making and administrative processes to become more effective.

2. Automated asset management system

12. The automated asset management system tracks the inventory of non-expendable assets based on the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) organizational identification number, linking them directly to the Departmental procurement process. As a result, the Organization is now able, for the first time, to track non-expendable assets at Headquarters throughout their useful life cycle, from procurement to disposal.

13. The System was implemented in June 2003. In partnership with all departments at Headquarters, the Facilities Management Service undertook the first complete physical inventory of non-expendable assets. An indicator of success is that over 300 property records custodians from 15 departments, including a focal point from each department, are participating in the project. By assigning value, tagging and tracking all such assets at Headquarters through their individual life cycles, there are direct benefits in assets control, accuracy of records and the standardization of reporting for accounting and insurance proposals. In addition, the system provides a basis for cost estimation to be used in future acquisition of equipment based on established industry standards, as well as the calculation of depreciation rates for specific equipment.

14. The system is client-driven and in line with the above-mentioned report of the Secretary-General, particularly in the focus areas of e-management and knowledge-sharing.

3. Vehicle usage monitoring system

15. The vehicle usage monitoring system (also referred to as "CarLog") is an electronic fleet management and security system for the fleet of vehicles at Headquarters. The system maintains records of designated driver, date, time, vehicle, speedometer reading and location. As a result, individual drivers can be matched with assignments, location, parking violations and accidents.

16. Prior to the implementation of the system, assignments were manually entered into a database for limited tracking purposes. The new system contains enhanced features that allow for the better management of vehicles. It also provides a detailed report for each driver for a specific time frame, which is used as a tool for evaluating the driver's performance in his/her annual performance appraisal reports.

17. CarLog was implemented in early 2003 and its use is now standard for all vehicles at Headquarters. In practice, vehicle monitoring results in fewer discrepancies regarding vehicular operations and reduced parking summonses. Viewed more broadly, CarLog increases the accountability of staff, reduces expenditures and represents an e-management approach to fleet management.

4. Requisition tracking system

18. The requisition tracking system is an online service request system, first implemented in March 2003. The system enables offices to submit their requests and monitor the progress in satisfying requirements for a comprehensive range of facilities management services that includes the provision of office space, construction and alterations, electrical installations, furniture and moving services. The prior practice was for the facilities management centralized help desk to receive service requests via telephone and log them in for assignment. Clients would have to call repeatedly for updates on the progress of the response to their requests. With the new system, calls to the help desk are limited to emergencies and for support on accessing and making effective use of the online system.

19. The system is client-driven and in line with the report of the Secretary-General on information and communications technology (ibid.). In addition, since requisitioning offices are able to monitor the progress of their service requirements online, the performance of the facilities management function can be continuously monitored, a feature that provides accountability.

5. Interagency systems contracts

20. The Task Force on Common Services at Headquarters, meeting in 2001 and 2002 (see A/60/70, para. 19), was influential in focusing the attention of senior managers on improvement opportunities that could extend the consolidated purchasing power of the Organization and advance greater sharing of marketplace information. Subsequently, a number of measures, some of which are noted below, have been implemented in this area.

21. The interagency systems contracts initiative allows full utilization of the purchasing expertise of a particular agency, enabling that agency to negotiate better prices on behalf of a group of agencies and to take advantage of economies of scale. The prior practice was for agencies to establish their own independent contracts for given commodities with vendors. This resulted in the loss of volume discounts and did not make effective use of existing expertise.

22. Over the last three years, interagency systems contracts have been developed and utilized for negotiating the purchase of a range of communications and information technology equipment, including desktop and laptop computers and monitors, software products, storage area network hardware and network servers. As this approach has proven itself, participating agencies have received many inquiries from other United Nations agencies requesting to become part of this network. The demonstrated benefits include a reduction in the cost of tendering and improved efficiency by eliminating individual tenders by agencies, thereby avoiding duplication of work. The implementation of interagency systems contracts fits well into the strategy of common use procurement, which effectively uses available resources and expertise in the system.

6. Global airline agreement for United Nations organizations, funds and programmes

23. In 2004, 37 United Nations organizations, funds, programmes and associated organizations joined together to negotiate a global airline discount agreement, which was successfully concluded with British Airways. Previous to the agreement, small

country offices of the United Nations and related organizations often did not have sufficient travel volume to obtain discounted airline tickets. As a result of this global leveraging, as of 1 March 2004, an agreement was put in place by which all offices, regardless of their size, could obtain discounted airline tickets directly from the airline. Their offices worldwide were made aware of this discount agreement. Any ticket issued under the agreement would be cheaper than regularly published airfares. This is a precedent-setting agreement, both for the vendor and the United Nations, and can serve as a model for future global airline agreements to leverage the air travel expenditures of the United Nations common system.

7. United Nations global marketplace

24. Launched in February 2004, the United Nations Global Marketplace is a website for registering potential vendors operated by 15 organizations within the United Nations system. The Global Marketplace allows vendors to submit an application for registration to a single site, thus eliminating the necessity of multiple applications. The site also helps the participating organizations to accumulate and share historical knowledge on vendor expertise and performance, thus supporting their decision-making. The Global Marketplace and its content is periodically updated to meet evolving requirements. Thus far, a direct benefit from the Global Marketplace site has been the reduction of the time vendors take to apply for registration with multiple organizations.

8. Strengthening network operations

25. A counterpart to improving productivity is preventing serious loss of productivity in daily operations. With the United Nations offices brought into a fully networked electronic environment and staff productivity largely dependent on reliable computer services, the safeguarding and continuous maintenance of computer systems has become critical to the Organization's mission. In this connection, the Department of Management has initiated a set of mutually reinforcing measures in the operations and maintenance of e-mail and the Secretariat's network, including screening for unsolicited or junk e-mail (spam), virus prevention, virus detection and countermeasures.

26. The United Nations Headquarters e-mail operation includes over 10,000 accounts and has nearly two dozen servers to maintain; e-mail is the most important enterprise-wide software application for the United Nations, affecting the vast majority of staff. The e-mail operation has been strengthened through two critical measures: (a) automated updates of the anti-virus software to all desktop computers, allowing the quick identification and removal of viruses; and (b) an anti-spam filtering facility, which removes most unsolicited and spurious incoming e-mail. The added reliability to the network and e-mail operations, combined with an extensive use of personal digital assistant devices, has allowed staff members to be connected and available regardless of their location. Both e-mail and network operations are client-driven and are building blocks of the information and communications technology strategy, providing infrastructure for knowledge sharing and e-management.

9. Improved information and communications technology risk management

27. A Secretariat-wide information and communications technology security risk management initiative has been fully implemented by the Department of Management at all major duty stations worldwide. This initiative was implemented to reduce the threats from spam and virus attacks and to minimize the hours of service downtime.

28. Previously, information and communications technology service delivery and operations were not explicitly assessed for threat and risk exposure, leaving them open to potential weaknesses that could result in the damage or loss of data and downtime in providing critical information and communications technology services.

29. The initiative resulted in an increasingly safer information technology operations environment and the more assumed availability of e-mail and network services. The establishment of this capability is in line with the report of the Secretary-General on the information and communications technology strategy. The initiative was conceived in the context of the security "building block" in support of advances in e-management, knowledge sharing and services to governing bodies.

10. United Nations Postal Administration

30. Through the issuance of stamps by the United Nations Postal Administration, the United Nations promotes its missions, mandates, goals and achievements and sustains a special relationship with the philatelic community. It is the only postal authority that issues stamps in three currencies, namely, the United States dollar, the euro and the Swiss franc. A turnaround project restructured its offices, re-engineered operations, evolved a definitive marketing strategy, designed better inventory management, introduced new products and revised pricing policy, thus making the United Nations Postal Administration a profitable undertaking.

31. The Postal Administration's customer base is predominantly serviced through mail order. The reorganization of European operations by their consolidation in Vienna led to major savings in staffing and resulted in better coordinated and efficient operations. New products were developed, some of which utilize overstocked stamps that were otherwise earmarked for destruction. A new marketing strategy has reversed the shrinking customer base, which has increased by over 4 per cent since the beginning of 2004. All of these measures were intended to reduce expenditure, minimize inventory build-up and increase productivity and profitability.

32. At this point, the reorganization of the offices has been successfully completed. The marketing strategy will continue to evolve and will be adjusted in response to changes in demands and requirements. Through June 2005, the Postal Administration posted a profit of over $2.25 million. In order to tap into new markets worldwide, the Postal Administration is in the final stages of testing a fully integrated e-commerce website, which is scheduled to be operational by the end of 2005.

11. Access of United Nations peacekeeping missions to the Integrated Management Information System

33. Since 2004, all missions, within the limits of their delegated authority, have been using IMIS for human resources administration of international staff and plans are being prepared for the implementation of human resources administration for local staff.

34. Concomitant with the extension of access were efforts to increase the number of hours IMIS is available to online users in different time zones and, on average, the system has been available between 2.5 and 3 hours longer every business day. Personnel actions are being recorded with improved timeliness and the distribution of work has improved the overall efficiency of human resources administration. Personnel sections in the field mission offices enter the information directly in IMIS, replacing the previous practice of preparing data locally for transmission to Headquarters for entry, a practice that not only added to the time consumed, but increased the risk of error. Furthermore, human resources officers in the field missions now have on-line access to information about staff members' entitlements, their implementation in the system and post management, allowing the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to provide better services to its staff. This measure, which is a part of the strategy to streamline processes and make fuller use of information technology, is a step towards the harmonization of human resources processing in the field and simplifying the monitoring of international staff by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

B. Improved management practices in human resources management

1. EarthMed

35. EarthMed is a web-based software that combines an occupational health and safety system with the electronic maintenance of medical records. EarthMed has been customized to improve the delivery of health care and medico-administrative services to staff and administration of the United Nations and its funds and programmes worldwide. The system is designed as a common platform that ensures instant accessibility of all United Nations medical personnel to a comprehensive database at all times. Re-engineering and the simplification of processes are achieved by consolidating all the information collected, generated and processed and by eliminating duplicate entries and redundant activities.

36. The system fixes or minimizes such problems as non-integrated and inefficient databases, the excessive use of paper documents, the inability of concurrent users to share information and "waiting/lost time" owing to the inefficiencies of manual access to medical records.

37. In terms of the current functioning of the system, the modules implemented include demographic statistics, immunizations (essential for the clearance of staff scheduled for mission deployment), incident reports, the management of sick leave certifications, the granting of medical clearances and advice on compensation claims and special dependency benefits.

38. In terms of geographic coverage, the system is currently available in New York, at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, and at the United Nations Office at Geneva. Plans are in place to implement in the United

Nations Office at Nairobi, the international tribunals and the remaining regional commissions.

39. Productivity is boosted through higher access speed and enhanced accuracy by reducing human intervention. Accountability is increased by the system's ability to trace every action performed to its source. This management improvement initiative shows linkage to several areas of the Secretary-General's programme for reform, including the creation of technological opportunities for sharing knowledge and extending the use of the Internet, building an expanded and enhanced common services platform and simplifying processes and rules.

2. Generic job profiles project

40. The generic job profiles project contributes to a streamlined vacancy announcement system through the creation of a global database containing preclassified generic job profiles, vacancy announcements and evaluation criteria. The measure simplified the preparation of vacancy announcements, which can now be developed through reference to a generic job profile rather than written as unique detailed job descriptions. The previous method required the preparation of a lengthy job description, analysis by two classification officers and approval by two senior officers of the Office of Human Resources Management.

41. Since the implementation of this project, approximately 80 per cent of the positions in the Secretariat have been covered by generic job profiles. The remaining positions are considered to be too specialized or unique to be described in a standardized organization-wide format. The feedback from programme managers and staff in general is positive. In addition to comprising a more streamlined and simplified process for those tasked with human resources duties, generic job profiles are also available to staff online, enabling them to see the competencies that would be required of them in other positions.

3. Human resources data reports

42. The Office of Human Resources Management has developed a set of standard data reports that clients can generate from a dedicated human resources website. This reporting tool enables the preparation of customized reports on geography, gender, mobility, age and selection decisions. The system replaces the previous manual and laborious creation of ad hoc data reports by facilitating the creation of report templates that can be used on a recurrent basis.

43. The system's innovative capability has enabled the Office of Human Resources Management to expand the pool of reports and meet the growing demand for data reports, both in terms of number and type. The new system meets client needs, minimizes duplication of effort and promotes a standardized approach to meeting human resources information demands.

4. Performance management: improvements in the Electronic Performance Appraisal System

44. The Electronic Performance Appraisal System (e-PAS), the electronic tool employed to make the process of holding staff accountable for their performance more efficient and timely, represents an enhancement of the original performance appraisal system that was introduced after extensive consultations throughout the

Secretariat. The revised e-PAS system takes into account the core values and competencies of the Organization, self-assessment by staff members, managerial competencies (for supervisory staff to provide an assessment of their supervisory skills), strengthened links between performance management and career development and enhanced accountability measures, such as the inclusion of a section for staff to comment on supervision received.

45. The e-PAS system is a technological as well as a substantive innovation. It has been the first United Nations application for staff members delivered globally over the Internet, with even small duty stations and recently established political and peacekeeping missions having full participation. Its development required the creation of the first directory that allows staff to use United Nations applications over the Internet on a secure basis. As a result, since its launch, many other computer applications can be delivered to staff on a global basis, using the same user registration and password. The registration process links the individual staff members' Integrated Management Information System record with his/her e-mail address, allowing the automatic transmission of information from United Nations applications to individual staff members by e-mail and the publishing of human resources information in electronic format. The e-PAS system also, for the first time, gathered all performance appraisal data into a single database, allowing supervisors to view the status of staff members' appraisals at one glance.

5. Online confirmation of dependency status

46. In keeping with elimination of paper forms and the inefficiencies of linear, "file and wait" processing of personnel transactions, the Office of Human Resources Management has created a form for the online confirmation of dependency status (form e-P.84), which enables staff members to review, edit and confirm their dependency status online. The form is expected to eliminate the need to raise separate personnel actions in IMIS, as is currently the case, and to facilitate self-certification, with accompanying accountability. The Office of Human Resources Management is planning to expand the pilot project to Bangkok and to some peacekeeping missions in the last quarter of 2005.

6. Human resources action plans

47. Not all measures in human resources management involve process improvement; some represent critical changes in strategic management functions. The human resources action plans provide a biennial framework for departments and offices to implement and evaluate their performance against the Organization's legislative and other mandates. The plans also constitute a compact between the heads of departments and offices and the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management and enable departments and the Office of Human Resources Management to monitor progress towards achieving established human resources management goals and targets.

48. Human resources action plans have become a major accountability tool. In 2003, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to hold department heads accountable for the implementation of their plans. In 2005, the monitoring of the implementation of human resources action plans became a mandate for the newly established Management Performance Board. A website allowing departments and offices to self-monitor by reviewing their relevant human resources

management data and indicators, designed for monthly updating, is scheduled to be implemented by the end of 2005.

C. Improved management practices in budgetary and financial management

1. Linkage of the 2006-2007 budget with the biennial programme plan

49. The Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts of the Department of Management has improved a number of practices in the budget process, banking procedures and capacities, financial reporting and financial services to staff. A fundamental and much desired change has been accomplished with the linkage of the 2006-2007 budget with the biennial programme plan.

50. The proposed programme budget for the biennium of 2006-2007 is the first to be submitted under the arrangements for aligning the plan and budget periods approved by the General Assembly in resolution 58/269. The shortened plan period has facilitated the alignment of resources with objectives and accomplishments approved by the Assembly for the two-year period.

51. In terms of results achieved thus far, the formulation process of the budget proposals has been greatly facilitated by the alignment of the plan and budget periods. With a synchronized cycle of two years for both plan and programme budget, there is no need for differences in the presentation of objectives, expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement. Because the logical frameworks in the programme budget are identical to those in the biennial programme plan, the time required to prepare the proposed programme budget has been reduced. The synchronized cycle has also obviated the need for the Committee for Programme and Coordination to review the programmatic aspects of the proposed programme budget, since the programme narratives are identical to those contained in the biennial programme plan. It is anticipated that by synchronizating two-year cycles for the plan, the budget outline and the budget, transparency and accountability will be enhanced.

2. Intranet support to budgeting

52. United Nations system-wide access and dissemination of pertinent budgetary information through its Intranet, through the maintenance of electronic repositories of selected official documents, has facilitated quick access to vital budgetary information, including budget documents, planning documents, regulations and rules, guidelines on results-based budgeting, standard costs and allotment account codes.

53. Prior to the implementation of the new Budget Information System, a great deal of work was required to forward instructions by e-mail to each separate office. Submissions received from each office were manually formatted and uploaded to the mainframe before any budget officer could analyse the data. Since 2004, budget instructions are now posted directly on the Intranet. Departments, offices away from Headquarters and the tribunals can access the Intranet for instructions, preparation and submission of their budget proposals. Budget officers can log on and review the submissions at any point during their preparation and are now able to provide timely feedback to client offices.

3. Treasury banking project to assist peacekeeping missions

54. The Secretariat's treasury banking project to assist peacekeeping missions was launched in 2004 and addressed local bank charges, cash transport and insurance. The goals of the project have been to improve the cash transportation and storage policies and procedures at missions; to implement new payment systems; to train mission staff in treasury procedures and policies; and to implement a model banking agreement between missions and local banking institutions. The treasury assisted the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission and the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia in 2003 and 2004, accomplishing these goals for each mission, and plans to assist five more missions in 2005 and 2006.

4. Society for Worldwide Inter-bank Financial Telecommunication

55. The United Nations joined the Society for Worldwide Inter-bank Financial Telecommunication to maintain secure, reliable and robust global communication links with banks to send payment instructions, execute payments and receive transaction data, such as account balances. By using the Society, the United Nations no longer needs to rely on the proprietary payment systems of individual banks, avoiding maintenance of multiple payment systems in-house and over-reliance on a single bank for the Organization's payment needs. Currently, the treasury uses the Society, which has 22 banks globally, to execute non-United States dollar payments and cross-border United States dollar payments. Full implementation of the improved disbursement function will occur when the interface between IMIS, the Operations Processing Integrated Control System[1] and the Society is completed. The replacement of paper vouchers thanks to the participation of the Society has already led to significant savings and enhanced security.

5. Final consolidated financial statements

56. In the area of financial reporting, the use of automation techniques has improved the review and consolidation of data in final consolidated financial statements. The preparation of consolidated financial statements had previously required manual entries for the insertion of data from offices away from headquarters. Automation has shifted work away from data gathering and inputting and allowed more time for the review and verification of accounts, thus improving efficiency and accuracy. Under the old system, the preparation of individual general trust fund statements was a semi-automated process. Full automation has saved time by generating a first draft, which can be the basis for further review and adjustments, as required, in preparing the final individual statements. In addition, the use of automation techniques can be used not only to produce individual statements but also combined statements for all the general trust funds.

57. The new methods have helped to improve the quality of financial statements by freeing up more time for analytical reviews and have enabled staff to meet all critical reporting deadlines and cope with an increased workload.

6. Client orientation in accounting and payroll services delivery

58. A new one-stop client service centre has provided United Nations staff and retirees with a single focal centre for the dissemination of information and resolution of all payroll, tax, insurance, after-service health insurance and related entitlement issues. Given the multi-functional design of the centre, clients can address multiple issues efficiently in a single visit.

59. In the area of payroll, as at February 2005, the monthly e-mail delivery of staff members' electronic pay slips was enhanced to provide additional useful information, including notifications of past due travel and education grant claims, recoveries from salary scheduled for the next pay period and rental subsidy grants that are about to expire. Staff members are now in a better position to promptly file claims documents.

60. The Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts is also providing access to the tax and insurance web pages to clients away from Headquarters through the Intranet. Improvements in the Intranet site have resulted in fewer in-person visits and inquiries by telephone and the communication of the most current information quickly and consistently to all parties concerned.

III. Review and implementation status of the efficiency measures for the reduction of duplication, complexity and bureaucracy in the United Nations administrative processes and procedures

61. By his note of 4 August 2003 (A/58/211), the Secretary-General transmitted to the General Assembly the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the review of duplication, complexity and bureaucracy in United Nations administrative processes and procedures.

62. In its report, the Office of Internal Oversight Services recommended that the Secretariat should:

(a) Automate the travel process to provide staff with an electronic travel request form interfaced with IMIS and an electronic travel claim form, which would use data available in the system;

(b) Streamline the travel process, exempting the claims procedure for travel that did not deviate from the authorized itinerary;

(c) (i) Further automate the processes for rental subsidy, education grant and dependency allowances to provide staff with access to their personal details and electronic forms for applying for entitlements;

(ii) Implement an employee self-certification, with a mechanism for the random checking of supporting documentation for rental subsidy and dependency allowances;

(d) Identify an Organization-wide application for procurement, which would be used at Headquarters, offices away from Headquarters and peacekeeping missions;

(e) Implement an information security and data privacy policy, with administrative instructions making electronic authorizations acceptable for approval and certification;

(f) Implement a central project registry for computerized systems.

63. Section III of the report provides a review and update of the implementation status of the recommendations as at August 2005. In accordance with the request of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, it also offers projected time frames for the final implementation of these measures.

A. Automation of the travel process

64. The goal of the electronic travel request form is to build an interface between IMIS and the travel agent's system to facilitate ticketing and invoicing for tickets, as well as to create an electronic travel request form.

65. To fully automate the process, it is necessary to create an electronic interface from the user's desktop to each Department's executive office. A multi-user group was convened, including the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the Accounts Division of the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts, the Executive Offices, IMIS and the Travel and Transportation Section to discuss the necessary policy and procedural changes. A bridge is being built between the Travel and Transportation Section and the travel agents through an IMIS interface. General work has been undertaken in this respect in 2005.

66. The electronic travel request form project has been given priority status by the IMIS User Group, which includes representatives from the concerned departments. A six-month development phase is anticipated, to be followed by a three-month testing phase before the system is presented. A pilot implementation by June 2006 is foreseen.

B. Streamlining of the travel process

67. In order to further streamline the electronic travel process, efforts have focused on the completion of the design phase for the electronic travel claim system, incorporating the latest IMIS improvements to the travel processing modules as well as workflow and process improvements. The necessary changes to IMIS are being tested and are expected to be implemented in the last quarter of 2005.

68. It is expected that the system changes will be completed and implemented on a pilot basis by the end of 2005 with further testing and modifications in 2006 prior to an Organization-wide launch.

C. Further automation of the processes for rental subsidy, education grant and dependency allowances and implementation of employee self-certification

69. A "My UN" Intranet portal for staff members of the Secretariat, which provides a single point of access for human resources activities such as vacancy application, emergency contact recording and dependency benefits application, was

deployed during the fourth quarter of 2004. An e-authentication system, which enables the Office of Human Resources Management to provide information from IMIS to staff members accessing the "My UN" portal, was deployed in the first quarter of 2005.

70. An Office of Human Resources Management and Department of Peacekeeping Operations task force on education grant policies and procedures met throughout 2003 and promulgated, in June 2004, an administrative instruction on education grant entitlements (ST/AI/2004/2). The new administrative instruction has succeeded in simplifying the criteria for admissible expenses. Furthermore, a new information circular (ST/IC/2005/25) was promulgated on 12 May 2005 to reflect the changes introduced by the administrative instruction. A list of inadmissible expenses has been drawn and is part of the guidelines for all offices worldwide and accessible through the electronic Human Resources Handbook.

71. The development of automated tools for rental subsidy, education grant, designation of beneficiary and personal address change is under way. These tools are intended to allow staff to provide information online that would be reviewed by the Office of Human Resources Management and, if approved, processed in IMIS, with due approval and certification action recorded in IMIS.

D. Identification of an Organization-wide application for procurement

72. In order to facilitate data exchange between Headquarters and the peacekeeping missions, the Procurement Service has been working with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to develop a common procurement management system. Once such a system has been developed, the exchange of data will be possible on a real-time basis via the Internet, thus improving the efficiency and oversight of the Secretariat's global procurement activities.

73. A document setting out the goals of this initiative has been finalized and the development team has completed the definition of objectives, scope and work plan. The team has also collected the necessary user requirements.

74. The Department of Management will prepare a high-level business case[2] for this project for submission to the Information and Communications Technology Board Project Review Committee by the end of 2005. Upon completion of the review, a timetable for the High-Level Business Case will be prepared that will determine which solution will be adopted to implement a new Organization-wide application for procurement for Headquarters, including integration with IMIS.

E. Implementation of an information security and data privacy policy

75. The bulletin of the Secretary-General entitled "Use of information and communication technology resources and data" (ST/SGB/2004/15) published on 29 November 2004, defines the proper use of information technology and related resources and data and ensures the security and technical integrity of the Secretariat systems.

76. Automated tools are being designed for the processing of a number of staff entitlements, which will allow staff to provide information online. The staff submissions will be reviewed by the Office of Human Resources Management and, if approved, processed in IMIS, with due approval and certification action recorded in IMIS.

F. Implementation of a central project registry for computerized systems

77. The e-Assets system of central project registry has been implemented and has been available on the Intranet since August 2003. In October 2004, the technical and substantive functions data definitions were changed in order to better align them with industry best practices. By December 2004, the data in e-Assets had been modified to reflect these changes.

78. With the completion of this system, an inventory of information and communication technology initiatives throughout the Secretariat is now available online to all managers who need an information and communication technology system. This enables them to explore whether an existing system can be used to fulfil their need as is or with some adaptation. More importantly, the inventory of information and communication technology systems is used by the Project Review Committee to ensure that new information and communication technology initiatives being reviewed by it are not duplicating existing systems. All new information and communication technology initiatives throughout the Secretariat are reviewed by the Project Review Committee, which recommends to the Information and Communication Technology Board whether or not such initiatives should be approved. Thus, the e-Assets system allows the Secretariat to avoid duplication of effort and ensures that existing systems are fully utilized.

IV. Conclusion

79. **The General Assembly may wish to take note of the present report.**

Notes

[1] OPICS is the software used by the Treasury to record, process, monitor and report on all of the transactions (foreign exchange/investments, etc.) that it carries out.

[2] The preparation of a high-level business case is a legal requirement stemming from Information and Communications Technology Board policies, United Nations budget instructions and the administrative instruction on information and communication technology initiatives (ST/AI/2005/10).